



TRANSLATION

I, Masahiro Kawashima, residing at 2-5-10-310, Furuishiba,
Koto-ku, Tokyo, Japan, state:

that I know well both the Japanese and English languages;

that I translated, from Japanese into English, Japanese Patent
Application No. 2004-092656, filed on March 26, 2004, and

that the attached English translation is a true and accurate
translation to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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[Name of Item]	Claims	1
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[Name of Item]	Description	1
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[Name of Document] Claims

[Claim 1]

A nitride semiconductor laser element characterized by comprising: a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and a semiconductor layer of a second conductivity type, which are stacked one upon the other and each comprises a nitride; a striped waveguide region for a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; and an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element, wherein a pn-junction of the semiconductor layer at a peripheral region remote from the waveguide region is broken.

[Claim 2]

A nitride semiconductor laser element comprising: a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and semiconductor layers of a second conductivity type, which are stacked one upon the other and each comprises a nitride; a striped waveguide region for a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; and an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element having no depletion layer in the semiconductor layer at a peripheral region remote from the waveguide region.

[Claim 3]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according

to Claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element is a region formed by implanting ions from the surface of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type.

[Claim 4]

A nitride semiconductor laser element characterized by comprising: a substrate; a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and a semiconductor layer of a second conductivity type, which are stacked on a main surface of the substrate and each comprises a nitride; a striped waveguide region for a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; an embedded insulation film covering a side face of the waveguide region and a surface of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; a first electrode in contact with a surface of the waveguide region; a protective insulation film covering at least a part of the embedded insulation film; a second electrode connected to the semiconductor layer of the first conductivity type; and an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element, provided by converting at least a part of the semiconductor layer at a peripheral region remote from the waveguide region into a higher resistance one by ion implantation.

[Claim 5]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to any one of Claims 1 to 4, characterized in that the insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element has an impurity peak concentration in the range from 1×10^{18} to 5×10^{21} atoms/cm³.

[Claim 6]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to any one of Claims 1 to 4, characterized in that the insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element has a peak of distribution of the impurity concentration in the depth direction in the range from 20 nm to 1 μ m from the surface of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type.

[Claim 7]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to any one of Claims 4 to 6, characterized in that the first electrode is formed in contact with the surface of the waveguide region so as to cover a part of the embedded insulation film, a pad electrode is formed in contact with the first electrode so as to cover a part of the protective insulation film, and the insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element includes a region below the embedded insulation film.

[Claim 8]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to any one of Claims 4 to 6, characterized in that the first electrode is formed in contact with the surface

of the waveguide region so as to cover a part of the embedded insulation film, a pad electrode is formed in contact with the first electrode so as to cover a part of the protective insulation film, and the insulation region for reducing the capacitance of the element includes at least the first electrode or a region below the pad electrode.

[Claim 9]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to any one of Claims 1 to 8, wherein the semiconductor laser element is a laser element for emitting bluish-purple light, and has responsiveness to input of pulse drive current of 1 ns or less.

[Claim 10]

A nitride semiconductor laser element characterized by comprising: a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and a semiconductor layer of a second conductivity type, which are stacked one upon the other and each comprises a nitride; a striped waveguide region of a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; and an insulative region having a withstand voltage of 10 V or more at a region other than the waveguide region in the semiconductor of the second conductivity type.

[Claim 11]

A nitride semiconductor laser element comprising:

a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and a semiconductor layer of a second conductivity type being different from the first conductivity type, which are stacked on a main surface of a substrate and each comprises a nitride; and a striped waveguide region for a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type, wherein at least a part of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type serves as a region for reducing the capacitance of the element by being converted into the first conductivity type in a direction of thickness at a peripheral region remote from the waveguide region.

[Name of Document]. Description

[Title of Invention] NITRIDE SEMICONDUCTOR LASER
ELEMENT

[Technical Field]

[0001]

The present invention relates to a nitride semiconductor laser element, and particularly to an insulation structure of peripheral regions of a waveguide region for a laser light. The semiconductor element is used, for example, for a laser diode (LD) for emitting a bluish-purple light.

[Background Art]

[0002]

An LD for emitting blue light having a short wavelength as a light source capable of high-density read/write of information from/to an optical disk device (such as a CD or DVD), as well as an LD for emitting bluish-purple light (abbreviated as bluish-purple LD hereinafter) for higher read/write density, have been considered promising. In addition, high-speed responsiveness of the bluish-purple LD has been required for further increasing the read/write speed (for example, double speed reading) of the DVD.

[0003]

Patent Literature 1 discloses a structure having a rich layer abundant in Al or B near the surface of a semiconductor layer continuously from the side face of

a striped ridge of a laser element, in order to prevent leakage current and short circuiting of the laser element.

[0004]

Patent Literature 2 discloses a GaN semiconductor compound laser element having a striped ridge waveguide, wherein a light absorbing region is formed by introducing impurity atoms by ion implantation at a position remote from the region immediately under the ridge in order to prevent an adverse effect due to light leaking from the waveguide region.

[Patent Literature 1] Jpn. Pat. Appln. KOKAI
Publication No. 2001-210914

[Patent Literature 2] Jpn. Pat. Appln. KOKAI
Publication No. 2003-31909

[Disclosure of Invention]

[Technical Problem]

[0005]

While there are many methods for obtaining high-speed LDs, one method may be to shorten responsiveness (rise time t_r and fall time t_f) with respect to input of pulse drive current by reducing an RC time constant (R denotes resistance and C denote capacitance of an element) of an equivalent circuit of LDs.

[0006]

In general, the capacitance of the LD element depends on its structure and material, or largely

depends on the area of the ridge, the material and thickness of an embedded insulation film covering the surface of a semiconductor layer, and the material and thickness of a protective insulation film covering the embedded insulation film. When area of a p-electrode opposed to a p-type layer is represented by S , dielectric constant of an inter-electrode insulation film of the element is represented by ϵ , and thickness of the inter-electrode insulation film is represented by d , the capacitance C of the element depends on $S \times \epsilon/d$. The capacitance of the portion where the p-electrode faces the p-layer with interposition of the thin embedded insulation film and the capacitance of a pn-junction between a p-type layer and n-type active layer are aligned in series in peripheral regions near the waveguide region. The capacitance of the portion where the p-electrode faces the p-type layer with interposition of a laminated insulation films in which a relatively thick protective insulation film and a thin embedded insulation film are laminated, and the capacitance of a pn-junction between a p-type layer and n-type active layer are aligned in series in the peripheral region of the waveguide region.

[0007]

The inventors of the present invention have made repeated studies for largely reducing the capacitance of the element of the bluish-purple LD, and found that

it is effective to reduce the capacitance at the peripheral region of the waveguide region as much as possible, or to nullify the capacitance.

[0008]

The present invention is accomplished based on the above-mentioned discoveries, and it is an object of the present invention to provide a nitride semiconductor laser element that is capable of complying with a requirement of high-speed responsiveness by largely reducing the capacitance of the element.

[Solution to Problem]

[0009]

A nitride semiconductor laser element according to a first embodiment of the invention is characterized by comprising: a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and a semiconductor layer of a second conductivity type, which are stacked one upon the other and each comprises a nitride; a striped waveguide region for a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; and an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element, wherein a pn-junction of the semiconductor layer at a peripheral region remote from the waveguide region is broken.

[0010]

A nitride semiconductor laser element according to a second embodiment of the invention is characterized

by comprising: a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and semiconductor layers of a second conductivity type, which are stacked one upon the other and each comprises a nitride; a striped waveguide region for a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; and an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element having no depletion layer in the semiconductor layer at a peripheral region remote from the waveguide region.

[0011]

A nitride semiconductor laser element according to a third embodiment of the invention is characterized by comprising: a substrate; a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and a semiconductor layer of a second conductivity type, which are stacked on a main surface of the substrate and each comprises a nitride; a striped waveguide region for a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; an embedded insulation film covering a side face of the waveguide region and a surface of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; a first electrode in contact with a surface of the waveguide region; a protective insulation film covering at least a part of the embedded insulation film; a second electrode substantially connected to the semiconductor layer of

the first conductivity type; and an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element, provided by converting at least a part of the semiconductor layer at a peripheral region remote from the waveguide region into a higher resistance one by ion implantation.

[0012]

A nitride semiconductor laser element according to a fourth embodiment of the invention is characterized by comprising: a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and a semiconductor layer of a second conductivity type being different from the first conductivity type, which are stacked on a main surface of a substrate and each comprises a nitride; and a striped waveguide region for a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type, wherein at least a part of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type serves as a region for reducing the capacitance of the element by being converted into the first conductivity type in a direction of thickness at a peripheral region remote from the waveguide region.

[0013]

A nitride semiconductor laser element according to a fifth embodiment of the invention is characterized by comprising: a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, an active layer and a semiconductor layer of a second conductivity type, which are stacked

one upon the other and each comprises a nitride; a striped waveguide region of a laser light provided on the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type; and an insulative region having a withstand voltage of 10 V or more at a region other than the waveguide region in the semiconductor of the second conductivity type.

[Advantageous Effects of Invention]

[0014]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to the first embodiment has an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element, wherein the pn-junction of the semiconductor layer at the peripheral region remote from the waveguide region is broken by ion implantation, and permits the capacitance of the element to be largely reduced to enable the element to comply with the requirement of high-speed response.

[0015]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to the second embodiment has an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element having no depletion layers, formed in the pn-junction region of the semiconductor layer at the peripheral region remote from the waveguide region, and permits the capacitance of the element to be largely reduced to enable the element to comply with the requirement of high-speed

response.

[0016]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to the third embodiment has an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element, wherein at least a part of the semiconductor layer at the peripheral region remote from the waveguide region is turned into a high resistance one by ion implantation, the insulative region thus being able to be obtained with good controllability.

[0017]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to the fourth embodiment has a diffusion region for reducing the capacitance of the element, wherein an impurity is diffused in at least a part of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity at the peripheral region remote from the waveguide region to turn the conductivity type into the first conductivity type, thereby easily obtaining a desired insulative region.

[0018]

The nitride semiconductor laser element according to the fifth embodiment has an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element having a withstanding voltage of 10 V or more in a region other than the waveguide region is turned into a high resistance one by ion implantation, and permits the

capacitance of the element to be largely reduced to enable the element to comply with the requirement of high-speed response.

[0019]

[Best Mode for Carrying Out the Invention]

<First embodiment>

In a first embodiment, ions were implanted (or protons were irradiated) into a semiconductor layer at a peripheral region a given distance or more remote from a waveguide region of a bluish-purple LD under a given condition to break pn-junctions in the region or to allow the semiconductor region to have no depletion layers, thereby converting that region into a higher resistance one (or into an insulation film). No depletion layers are formed and no pn-junction capacitance is generated in the insulative region formed into the insulation film. It is preferable in this case to allow a desired effect of reducing the capacitance of the element to be obtained by noticing a relation between a peak concentration of impurities and the distribution of the impurity concentration in the depth direction, and the effect of reducing the capacitance of the element. The insulative region has a withstand voltage of, for example, 10 V or more.

[0020]

FIG. 1 is a schematic illustration of an example of the cross-sectional structure when the LD according

to the first embodiment is cut in a direction perpendicular to the laser resonance direction (in a direction parallel to the resonance surface). The structure of opposed electrodes is shown in this drawing, where a pair of electrodes of the LD are separated into upper and lower surfaces of a chip.

[0021]

In the LD shown in FIG. 1, semiconductor layers of a first conductivity type (203 and 204), an active layer 205 and semiconductor layers of a second conductivity type (206 to 209) different from the first conductivity type are sequentially grown and laminated on a first main surface of a substrate 101. Each of the semiconductor layers (201 to 204) of the first conductivity type comprises a nitride semiconductor layer containing aluminum (Al).

[0022]

Ridge portions each having planar stripes and a protruded cross-section are formed on upper parts 209 and 208 of the semiconductor layers of the second conductivity type as waveguide regions for narrowing an electric current, and resonance surfaces are formed at edge surfaces so that the resonance surface is approximately perpendicular to these waveguide regions. A thin embedded insulation film 220 covering the side face of the waveguide region and the upper surface of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type,

a first electrode 230 making ohmic contact with the surface of the waveguide region and covering the upper surface of the waveguide region and a part of the surface of the embedded insulation film 220, and a protective insulation film 240 are further formed. The protective insulation film 240 is formed so as to cover at least a part of the surface of the embedded insulation film 220, and side faces of a part of the semiconductor layers (206 to 209) of the second conductivity type, the active layer 205 and a part of the semiconductor layers (201 to 204) of the first conductivity type. A pad electrode 250 is formed on the first electrode, and a second electrode 210 is formed on a second main surface of the substrate. The pad electrode 250 on the first electrode is formed so as to cover a part of the surface of the protective insulation film 240.

[0023]

An insulative region 1 for reducing the capacitance of the element is formed in this embodiment by converting the region into a higher resistance one by ion implantation into a peripheral region a given distance or more remote from the waveguide region. Since the ions are implanted before forming the embedded insulation film 220, it is possible to form the insulative region 1 having a desired distribution of the impurity concentration in the depth direction

with good controllability by appropriately controlling ion implantation conditions such as the dosage and acceleration voltage (depth of implantation). As the ion species, use may be made of aluminum (Al), indium (In), boron (B), oxygen (O), nitrogen (N), and hydrogen, wherein the insulative region 1 for reducing the capacitance of the element has either a leakage light absorbing function, or lower light absorption effect (such as B, O, N and H) depending on the ion species used, as described in Patent Literature 2.

FIGS. 2(a) and (b) schematically illustrate the cross-sectional structure of the semiconductor layer part at the ridge portion of the LD in FIG. 1 and in the vicinity thereof, and the relation between a planar pattern of said semiconductor layer part and in the vicinity thereof and the ion-implanted region, respectively.

[0025]

When the width of the ridge portion is about 1.6 μm and the entire width of the region for maintaining safety zones (a width considering migration of introduced atoms by thermal diffusion) at the ridge portion and both sides thereof is about 5 μm in FIGS. 2(a) and 2(b), the distance (separated distance) from the ridge portion to the insulative region 1 for reducing the capacitance of the element is about 1.7 μm . A material having a low dielectric constant (for

example, ZrO_2 film) is used for the embedded insulation film 220.

[0026]

According to the above-mentioned construction of the LD, the insulative region 1, which has an increased electrical resistance (or is insulated) by ion implantation, is formed in at least a part of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type of the peripheral region a given distance or more remote from the waveguide region, or to a depth reaching the semiconductor layer 203 of the first conductivity type in this embodiment. The pn-junction is broken in this insulative region 1, and no depletion layers are formed, thereby generating no pn-junction capacitances.

[0027]

The capacitance is reduced in this construction because a thick insulation film including the embedded insulation film 220 and the insulative region 1 is formed between the first electrode 230 and the second electrode 210 in the region where the first electrode 230 contacts the embedded insulation film 220 at the peripheral region remote from the waveguide region. In addition, in the region where the pad electrode 250 contacts the protective insulation film 240, the capacitance is further reduced since a thick insulation film including the protective insulation film 240, the embedded insulation film 220 and the insulative region

1 is formed between the pad electrode 250 and the second electrode 210.

[0028]

It is preferable to notice the relation between the peak impurity concentration and the distribution of the impurity concentration in the depth direction in the insulative region 1, and the effect of reducing the capacitance of the element in order to obtain a desired effect of reducing the capacitance of the element. Accordingly, ion implantation is devised so that ions are implanted several times by changing, for example, the acceleration voltage in order to obtain a desired effect of reducing the capacitance of the element. This enables the capacitance of the LD element to be largely reduced, thereby complying with the requirement of high-speed response as will be described hereinafter.

[0029]

FIG. 5 is a characteristic graph schematically illustrating the distribution of the impurity concentration in the depth direction of the insulative region 1 formed by ion implantation in the semiconductor layer portion of the LD in FIG. 1.

[0030]

FIGS. 6(a) and 6(b) are characteristic graphs illustrating an example of the relation between the acceleration voltage or the implantation (peak) depth and the effect of reducing the capacitance of the

element when ions are implanted for forming the insulative region in the semiconductor layer portion of the LD in FIG. 1, respectively.

[0031]

According to FIG. 5, it was revealed that the effect of reducing the capacitance of the element increases when the peak impurity concentration in the insulative region 1 is controlled in the range from 1×10^{18} to 5×10^{21} atoms/cm³, and the concentration distribution is adjusted so that the peak impurity concentration in the depth direction lies in the range from 20 nm to 1 μ m, preferably in the range from 30 nm to 200 nm, from the surface of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type.

[0032]

While ions may be implanted once, it is possible to implant the ions plural times with an arbitrary combination of ion species, dosage and acceleration voltage.

[0033]

When ions are implanted once, the capacitance of the element is, for example, 8 pF at a dosage of 3×10^{16} atoms/cm² and an acceleration voltage of 60 KeV. This shows a capacitance reduction rate of about 20% as compared with the capacitance of the element (10 pF) when ions are implanted at an acceleration voltage of 20 KeV. The capacitance of the element is reduced to

about 6.7 pF when ions are implanted at an acceleration voltage of 100 KeV.

[0034]

When ions are implanted in plural times (for example, three times), the acceleration voltage may be changed to 30 KeV, 45 KeV or 60 KeV for each implantation at a dosage of 1×10^{16} atoms/cm² in order to permit the insulative region 1 to acquire a light absorption effect and a light confinement effect. It is also possible to adjust the refractive index with respect to the laser light by using different ion species for each ion implantation. Doping of In into the nitride film semiconductor permits the refractive index to be increased, while doping of Al or B permits the refractive index to be decreased.

[0035]

For example, the light confinement effect can be increased by implanting B into the layers below the active layer, In into the active layer region and Al into the layers above the active layer when ions are implanted three times. FIG. 7 is a schematic illustration of an example of the cross-sectional structure of the LD in this case. In FIG. 7, the reference numeral 71 denotes a B-implanted layer, the reference numeral 72 denotes an In-implanted layer and the reference numeral 73 denotes an Al-implanted layer. Other portions are given the same reference numerals as

those in FIG. 1.

[0036]

When ions are implanted twice, for example when Al ions are implanted at an acceleration voltage of 60 KeV and B ions are implanted at an acceleration voltage of 30 KeV each at a dosage of 1×10^{16} atoms/cm² in order to form a B-implanted layer and an Al-implanted layer in this order from the surface of the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type, the light leaking to the substrate side may be efficiently absorbed with the Al-implanted layer. In addition, ripples (noises) superimposed on the laser light may be suppressed by simultaneously changing the dosage and acceleration voltage when ions are implanted plural times.

[0037]

A desired compound may be obtained by implanting different ion species into a region at the same depth, when ions are implanted plural times (for example twice). For example, AlN can be obtained by implanting Al at a first run and N at a second run, AlO can be obtained by implanting Al at a first run and O at a second run, and BN can be obtained by implanting B at a first run and N at a second run.

[0038]

The effect of reducing the capacitance of the element may be also achieved by implanting the ions into only a part of the semiconductor layers (206 to

209) of the second conductivity type without implanting the ions into the active layer 205, when the ions are implanted as described above to form the insulative region 1 so that the impurity concentration peak is formed at the surface layer of the semiconductor layers (206 to 209) of the second conductivity type.

[0039]

The effect of reducing the capacitance of the element may be also achieved by implanting the ions to a depth reaching a part of the semiconductor layers (201 to 204) of the first conductivity type to form the insulative region 1 so that the impurity concentration peak is formed in the active layer 205.

[0040]

Further, when the pad electrode 250 is formed so that it covers a part of the surface of the protective insulation film 240 while it contacts the surface of the first electrode 230, the effect of reducing the capacitance of the element may be obtained by forming the insulative region 1 only in the region below the pad electrode 250.

[0041]

When the first electrode 230 is formed so as to cover a part of the surface of the embedded insulation film 220, the desired effect of reducing the capacitance of the element may be obtained by forming the insulative region 1 for reducing the capacitance of

the element only in the region below the embedded insulation film 220. The desired effect of reducing the capacitance of the element may be also obtained by forming the insulative region by ion implantation only into the region below the first electrode 230 (indicated by 3 in the figure) on the surface of the embedded insulation film 220 of the peripheral regions a given distance or more remote from the waveguide region.

[0042]

When the above-mentioned semiconductor laser element is applied to a laser element for emitting a bluish-purple light, both the rise time and fall time of the pulse drive current that are factors for determining responsiveness with respect to input of the pulse drive current may be reduced to 1 ns or less, or to 0.5 ns or less.

[0043]

A part of the constituting elements of the LD mentioned above will be described in detail below.

[0044]

(Substrate)

The substrate 101 for growing the nitride film semiconductor layer is preferably made of the same material as used in the semiconductor, because no problem of lattice mismatch and the like occurs when the substrate comprises the same material as used in

the semiconductor. Dislocations generated on the surface of the substrate are required to be reduced in the substrate for growing the semiconductor in order to improve the characteristics of the semiconductor element. The substrate is also required to be cleavable for forming chips of the semiconductor element from the wafer of the substrate on which the semiconductor has been grown.

[0045]

While the substrate is preferably a single-component substrate consisting of a single semiconductor, a conductive or an insulative substrate totally or partially comprising dissimilar materials different from the semiconductor in the single-component substrate may be also used. The semiconductor of the single-component substrate is a compound semiconductor such as a Group III-V compound semiconductor or Group II-VI compound semiconductor. Specific examples include GaN compound semiconductors, GaAs compound semiconductors and ZnO compound semiconductors. The above-mentioned dissimilar materials are sapphire, SiC, Si, spinel, SiO₂, SiN and the like.

[0046]

When a conductive substrate having first and second main surfaces is used, a semiconductor layer and an electrode are sequentially formed on the first main

surface side, and a nitride semiconductor laser element having an opposed electrode structure with an electrode formed on the second main surface side may be obtained. Input of large electric current is possible in this laser element, and the element can emit a light with a high output power.

[0047]

(Semiconductor layer of the first conductivity type, active layer and semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type)

The semiconductor layer of the first conductivity type, active layer and semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type are made of a compound semiconductor, or a nitride semiconductor in the embodiment. The nitride semiconductor is represented by a general formula of $\text{In}_x\text{Al}_y\text{Ga}_{1-x-y}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 1$, $0 \leq y \leq 1$, $0 \leq x + y \leq 1$).

[0048]

For example, the first semiconductor layer has an n-type nitride semiconductor, and the second semiconductor layer has an inverse conductivity type (p-type) nitride semiconductor different from the n-type nitride semiconductor. The n-type nitride semiconductor contains at least one of Si, Ge, O and the like as n-type impurities. The p-type nitride semiconductor contains Mg, Zn and the like as p-type impurities. The active layer has either a multi-

quantum well structure or a single quantum well structure.

[0049]

(Waveguide region)

The waveguide region is striped and propagates a light. The propagated light is amplified by being resonated on a resonance surface and generates laser light. The waveguide region is a narrowing region that enables an electric current to be efficiently injected, and the cross-sectional shape of the narrowing region is preferably protruded, since this structure permits the light to be confined.

[0050]

An example of the method for producing the semiconductor laser element of the first embodiment will be described below with reference to FIG. 1. A substrate having a first main surface and second main surface is used in the first embodiment. Semiconductor layers are laminated on the first main surface, while an electrode is formed on the second main surface. The semiconductor layer has a separated confinement heterostructure (SCH) in which an active layer is inserted between the semiconductor layer of the first conductivity type and the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type. This structure permits an optical waveguide to be formed by providing an optical guide layer having a larger band gap than the active

layer above and below the active layer.

[0051]

(First step)

A semiconductor layer is first grown on the substrate. A nitride semiconductor substrate 101 is used as the substrate in this example. The nitride semiconductor substrate 101 is made of GaN or AlN as a compound of Group III element such as B, Ga, Al and In with nitrogen, or AlGaIn or InAlGaIn as a three- or four-component mixed crystal compound. The nitride semiconductor substrate may also contain n-type impurities or p-type impurities.

[0052]

There are various methods for producing the nitride semiconductor substrate. After allowing a nitride semiconductor layer having reduced dislocations to grow on a dissimilar substrate of a different material from the nitride semiconductor by a vapor phase growth method such as an ELO (epitaxial lateral overgrowth) method or selective growth method, the dissimilar substrate used as a growth substrate is removed, providing to the single-component nitride semiconductor substrate. Grinding, cutting, etching and laser irradiation are used for removing the dissimilar substrate. The nitride semiconductor substrate thus produced is used in the invention. Otherwise, a bulk single crystal formed by a

hydrothermal synthesis method by which crystals are grown in a supercritical fluid, a high pressure method or a flux method may be used as the nitride semiconductor substrate.

[0053]

The vapor phase growth method includes an MOCVD (metalorganic chemical vapor deposition) method and HVPE (halide vapor phase epitaxial growth) method. A buffer layer made of a nitride semiconductor is allowed to grow on a dissimilar substrate such as a sapphire, SiC or GaAs substrate. The growth temperature of the buffer layer is 900°C or less. Then, a nitride semiconductor is grown on the dissimilar substrate to a thickness of 50 μm or more. The dissimilar substrate is removed thereafter by grinding, electromagnetic wave irradiation (such as irradiation of excimer laser) or CMP (chemical mechanical polishing). The growth surface of the nitride semiconductor serves as a first main surface, while the exposed surface side of the nitride semiconductor substrate exposed by removing the dissimilar substrate serves as a second main surface. In this manner, a nitride semiconductor substrate can be obtained.

[0054]

The first main surface is provided by a C-plane, an A-plane or an M-plane of the nitride semiconductor substrate 101. The first main surface may have a (000-

1) plane other than the crystal growth surface of the C-, A- or M-plane. The second main surface of the substrate is preferably the (000-1) plane while a (0001) plane may be also provided. In this specification, the bar (-) representing a plane index represents a bar to be attached on the numeral immediately after the bar. The shape of the outer periphery of the nitride semiconductor substrate is not particularly restricted, and it may be a wafer-shape or rectangular.

[0055]

Dislocations may be periodically distributed in the crystal plane of the nitride semiconductor substrate 101. For example, a region having a low dislocation density and a region having a high dislocation density are alternately formed as stripes using the ELO method. Since the nitride semiconductor substrate has a function for relaxing internal stress generated inside, it is possible to laminate the nitride semiconductor element to a thickness of 5 μm or more without forming a stress relaxation layer on the substrate. The stripe includes a stripe formed as a broken line. A specific example of the ELO method is a method for allowing the nitride semiconductor to grow again after forming rugged portions on the substrate. The low dislocation density region as used herein refers to a region having the number of dislocations of

$1 \times 10^7/\text{cm}^2$ or less, preferably $1 \times 10^6/\text{cm}^2$ or less per unit area. The high dislocation density region may be a region having a higher dislocation density than the above-mentioned low dislocation density region. These dislocations are observed by CL or TEM.

[0056]

Another example of the nitride semiconductor substrate has a first region containing first n-type impurities and a second region containing n-type impurities different from those in the first region on the first main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate. The method for forming the first region and second region containing different n-type impurities to one another comprises, during the production step of the nitride semiconductor substrate, the steps of forming the first region by allowing the nitride semiconductor to grow while n-type impurities are doped on the first main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate, and forming the second region by ion implantation of n-type impurities different from those in the first region on the surface other than the first region. Another example of the method for forming the second region comprises the steps of forming concave portions on the surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate, and allowing the concave portion to recrystallize while n-type impurities different from those in the first region are doped.

[0057]

An off-angle may be formed on the surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate, or a freshly exposed surface may be formed by gliding the surface by etching and the like. The off-angle is preferably from 0.02° or more to 90° or less, more preferably from 0.05° or more to 5° or less.

[0058]

The concentration of the n-type impurity contained in the nitride semiconductor substrate is from $1 \times 10^{17} \text{ cm}^{-3}$ to $1 \times 10^{20} \text{ cm}^{-3}$. The thickness of the nitride semiconductor substrate is from $50 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$ or more to 1 mm or less, preferably from $50 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$ or more to $500 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$ or less. The thickness in this range permits the substrate to be cleaved with good reproducibility after forming the nitride semiconductor laser element on the substrate. A thickness of the nitride semiconductor substrate of less than $50 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$ makes handling of the substrate in the device step difficult.

[0059]

Arbitrary rugged portions may be formed on the first main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate by subjecting the surface to wet etching, dry etching or CMP treatment. Dry etching includes RIE (reactive ion etching), RIBE (reactive ion beam etching), ECR (electron cyclotron resonance), ICP (inductively coupled plasma), FIB (focused ion beam)

and the like. The nitride semiconductor substrate partially having different surfaces for crystal growth as described above is preferable for quenching stress and deformation generated on the substrate.

Specifically, the substrate has the (0001) plane as the first main surface, and (000-1), (11-20), (10-15), (10-14) and (11-24) planes as crystal growth surfaces different from the (0001) plane.

[0060]

The second main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate has at least two different crystal growth surfaces, and preferable examples of the surface include (000-1), (0001), (11-20), (10-15), (10-14) and (11-24) planes. Such nitride semiconductor substrate permits the nitride semiconductor element to grow on the substrate to suppress the stress applied on the element, and is durable against damage given by cleaving.

[0061]

The nitride semiconductor substrate has a dislocation density of $1 \times 10^6/\text{cm}^2$ or less, preferably $5 \times 10^5/\text{cm}^2$ or less. Life spun characteristics can be improved by forming the waveguide region having a ridge formed on the upper part of the low dislocation region. The nitride semiconductor substrate has a full width at half maximum of the (0002) X-ray diffraction curve of 100 arcsec or less, preferably 60 arcsec or less, as

measured by a biaxial crystal method.

[0062]

The semiconductor layer on the nitride semiconductor substrate 101 is laminated on the first surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate in the following order. The semiconductor layer of the first conductivity type is defined as an n-side semiconductor layer and the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type is defined as a p-side semiconductor layer in this embodiment. $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.5$) doped with an n-type impurity and $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.3$) are grown as an n-side clad layer 203 and an n-side optical guide layer 204, respectively. The active layer 205 is represented by $\text{In}_x\text{Al}_y\text{Ga}_{1-x-y}\text{N}$ ($0 < x \leq 1$, $0 \leq y < 1$, $0 < x + y \leq 1$). Increasing the content of Al permits light emission at an ultraviolet region. Light emission at a long wavelength side in the range from 360 to 580 nm is also possible. Luminous efficiency is improved by forming the active layer 205 as a quantum well structure. The proportion (x) of In in the mixed crystal of the well layer is represented by $0 < x \leq 0.5$. The thickness of the well layer is from 3 to 20 nm, and the thickness of the barrier layer is from 5 to 30 nm. Then, a p-side layer comprising $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.5$) doped with a p-type impurity as a p-side electron confinement layer 206, $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.3$) as a p-side optical guide layer 207, $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.5$) doped

with a p-type impurity as a p-side clad layer 208, and $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 1$) doped with a p-type impurity as a p-side contact layer 209 is formed. The semiconductor layers may be mixed crystals of In. The p-side electron confinement layer 206 may be omitted.

[0063]

The semiconductor layer may comprise an n-side clad layer grown with interposition of a low temperature growth buffer layer 201 on the first main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate 101, an intermediate layer 202 and a crack preventive layer.

[0064]

The nitride semiconductor laser element of this embodiment has an SCH structure (separate confinement heterostructure) having the optical guide layers formed on both sides of the active layer. The N-side clad layer and p-side clad layer are formed on both sides the structure. The clad layer is provided by a nitride semiconductor layer having a low refractive index to confine the light. The clad layer also has a carrier confinement effect. A stress buffer layer may be provided between respective layers.

[0065]

The multi-quantum well structure of the active layer may start from the barrier layer and end at the well layer, start from the barrier layer and end at the barrier layer, start from the well layer and end at the

barrier layer, or start from the well layer and end at the well layer. Preferably, the multi-quantum well structure starts from the barrier layer and ends at the well layer with pairs of the well layer and the barrier layer interposed therebetween, wherein the pairs are repeated twice to eight times. The pairs of the well layer and barrier layer repeated twice or three times are preferable for improving the life span characteristics by lowering the threshold current.

[0066]

The n-side clad layer and p-side clad layer may be either a single layer structure, a dual layer structure or a super lattice structure comprising two layers having different composition ratios to one another. The total thickness of the n-side and p-side clad layer is from 0.4 to 10 μm , and this range is preferable for reducing a forward voltage (V_f). The average composition ratio of Al in the entire clad layer is in the range from 0.02 to 0.1. This range is preferable for suppressing cracks from being generated and for obtaining a sufficient difference of the refractive index between the clad layer and laser waveguide. The dosage of the n-type impurity is from $1 \times 10^{17}/\text{cm}^3$ to $5 \times 10^{19}/\text{cm}^3$. Doping the n-type impurity in this range permits the resistivity to be low while crystallinity is not impaired. The dosage of the p-type impurity is from $1 \times 10^{19}/\text{cm}^3$ to $1 \times 10^{21}/\text{cm}^3$. Crystallinity is not

impaired when the p-type impurity is doped within this range.

[0067]

The clad layer may be grown on the nitride semiconductor substrate with interposition of an underlayer. The underlayer is represented by $\text{Al}_a\text{Ga}_{1-a}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq a \leq 0.5$). This composition permits the dislocations (penetrating dislocations) and pits generated on the surface of the nitride semiconductor to be reduced. The underlayer has a single layer structure or a multilayer laminated structure. When the n-side clad layer is the single layer, it is represented by a general formula $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.2$), and has a thickness of from 0.5 to 5 μm . The superlattice structure is a laminated structure comprising a first layer $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.1$) and a second layer $\text{Al}_y\text{Ga}_{1-y}\text{N}$ ($0.01 \leq y \leq 1$) for allowing it to grow as a multilayer.

[0068]

Examples of the n-type impurity include Si, Ge, Sn, S, O, Ti, Zr and Cd, while examples of the p-type impurity include Mg as well as Be, Zn, Mn, Ga and Sr. The impurity is preferably doped at a concentration of from $5 \times 10^{16}/\text{cm}^3$ or more to $1 \times 10^{21}/\text{cm}^3$ or less. When the concentration of the impurity is larger than $1 \times 10^{21}/\text{cm}^3$, crystallinity of the nitride semiconductor layer is impaired and output power tends to be

decreased. This tendency is the same in modified doping. The substrate and nitride semiconductor layer are allowed to grow using the vapor phase growth method such as the MOCVD method, HVPE method and molecular beam epitaxy (MBE) method.

[0069]

(Second step)

The wafer having the semiconductor layer 2 comprising the n-side semiconductor layer, the active layer and the p-side semiconductor layer laminated on the nitride semiconductor substrate 101 is taken out of the reaction chamber of the semiconductor growth apparatus.

[0070]

Then, the n-side semiconductor layer is exposed by etching for stress relaxation. While the exposed surface of the n-side semiconductor layer is not particularly restricted, the surface is exposed up to the n-side clad layer in this embodiment. For the etching, the RIE method is used, wherein the etching is conducted using a gas such as Cl_2 , CCl_4 , BCl_3 or SiCl_4 .

[0071]

Then, a waveguide region comprising a striped electric current narrowing region is formed on the p-side semiconductor layer. A protective film comprising SiO_2 and the like is formed on the surface of a p-side contact layer as an uppermost layer of the p-side

semiconductor layer. This protective layer is patterned for forming the striped waveguide region, and the area except the striped waveguide region is removed by etching. The region is etched by the RIE method using a chlorine-containing gas such as Cl_2 , CCl_4 , SiCl_4 and BCl_3 . The width of the ridge portion as the waveguide region is in the range from 1.0 to 50.0 μm . The length of the waveguide region in the direction of stripe is in the range from 300 to 1000 μm . The width of the ridge portion is preferably in the range from 1.0 to 2.0 μm when the laser light is single mode. An output power of 200 mW or more is possible when the width of the ridge portion is 10 μm or more. The height (the depth of etching) of the ridge portion may be in a range sufficient for exposing the p-side optical guide layer. The electric current rapidly expands in a lateral direction below the ridge portion by allowing a large electric current to flow. Accordingly, the depth of etching for forming the ridge portion is preferably up to the p-side optical guide layer.

[0072]

(Third step)

After forming the ridge portion as the above-mentioned striped waveguide region, a resist mask (not shown) is formed so that the mask covers a desired range (about 5 μm in width) including the surface of

the ridge portion using a photolithography technique. Ions are implanted from the surface of the wafer under a given condition (a dosage in the range from 1×10^{14} to 3×10^{16} atoms/cm², and an acceleration voltage in the range from 20 to 200 KeV, preferably from 40 to 200 KeV). The concentration of the impurity and concentration distribution, and the depth of implantation from the surface can be controlled by adjusting the acceleration voltage and implantation time. Examples of the ion species available include H, He, Li, Be, B, C, N, O, F, Ne, Na, Mg, Al, Si, P, S, Cl, Ar, K, Ca, Sc, Ti, V, Vr, Mn, Fe, Co, Ni, Cu, Zn, Ga, Ge, As, Se, Br, Kr, Rb, Sr, Y, Zr, Nb, Mo, Ru, Pd, Ag, Cd, In, Sn, Sb, Te, I, Xe, Cs, Ba, Hf, Ta, W, Ir, Pt, Au, Hg, Pb, Bi, La, Ce, Pr, Nd, Pm, Sm, Eu, Tb, Dy, Er, Tm, Yb and Lu.

[0073]

Thereafter, the resist mask (not shown) is removed with a stripping solution.

[0074]

(Fourth step)

Then, the side face of the ridge portion is protected with the embedded insulation film 220. The material of the embedded insulation film is selected from insulating materials having a refractive index smaller than that of the semiconductor layer. Specific examples of the material include ZrO₂ and SiO₂ as well

as oxides of V, Nb, Hf, Ta and Al.

[0075]

After protecting the side face of the ridge portion with the embedded insulation film, a p-electrode 230 is formed on the surface of the p-side contact layer. The p-electrode is preferably formed on the p-side contact layer and embedded insulation film. The p-electrode has a multilayer structure. For example, when the p-electrode has a dual layer structure of Ni and Au, the Ni layer is first formed on the p-side contact layer with a thickness of from 5 to 20 nm, and then the Au layer is formed with a thickness of from 50 to 300 nm. When the p-electrode has a triple layer structure, the layer comprises a Ni/Au/Pt or Ni/Au/Pd layer. The Ni and Au layers may be the same thickness as that in the dual layer structure, and the Pt or Pd layer as a final layer has a thickness of from 50 to 500 nm.

[0076]

After forming the p-electrode 230, it is subjected to ohmic annealing. Detailed condition is at an annealing temperature of 300°C or more, preferably 500°C or more. The atmosphere for annealing contains nitrogen and/or oxygen.

[0077]

Then, a protective film 240 is formed on the side face of the n-side semiconductor layer exposed in the

foregoing step. Subsequently, a pad electrode 250 is formed on the p-electrode 230. The pad electrode 250 is preferably a laminate of metals such as Ni, Ti, Au, Pt, Pd and W. For example, the pad electrode is formed in the order of W/Pd/Au or Ni/Ti/Au from the p-electrode side. While the thickness of the pad electrode is not particularly restricted, the thickness of Au in the final layer is 100 nm or more.

[0078]

(Fifth step)

An n-electrode 210 is formed on the second main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate. The n-electrode is formed on the second main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate by CVD, sputtering or vacuum deposition. The electrode has at least one selected from the group consisting of Ti, Ni, Au, Pt, Al, Pd, W, Rh, Ag, Mo, V and Hf. The uppermost layer of the multilayer structure of the electrode preferably comprises Pt or Au for enabling heat dissipation from the electrode to be improved. Ohmic characteristics, particularly between the substrate made of the nitride semiconductor and electrode, can be obtained by selecting these materials for the material of the electrode formed on the second main surface. Since adhesiveness between the substrate made of the nitride semiconductor and electrode is excellent, the electrode is efficiently prevented from being peeled in a

cleaving step for forming bars or chips from the wafer. The thickness of the n-electrode is 1000 nm or less, preferably 600 nm or less. When the n-electrode has a multilayer structure, the first layer is particularly made of V, Ti, Mo, W or Hf. The thickness of the first layer is 50 nm or less. A thickness of 30 nm or less is preferable for obtaining good ohmic characteristics when the first layer is made of W. The first layer made of V is preferable for improving heat resistance. The thickness of V is from 5 nm or more to 30 nm or less, preferably 7 nm or more to 20 nm or less for obtaining good ohmic characteristics.

[0079]

The total thickness of the n-electrode 210 comprising Ti/Al is 1000 nm or less, for example the thickness is 10 nm/500 nm. When the n-electrode is formed by laminating Ti/Pt/Au in this order from the second main surface side of the nitride semiconductor layer, each thickness is 6 nm/100 nm/300 nm. When the n-electrode comprises Ti/Mo/Pt/Au from second the main surface side of the nitride semiconductor, each thickness is represented by Ti (6 nm)/Mo (50 nm)/Pt (100 nm)/Au (210 nm). When the n-electrode comprises Ti/Hf/Pt/Au, each thickness is, for example, represented by Ti (6 nm)/Hf (6 nm)/Pt (100 nm)/Au (300 nm). When the electrode comprises Ti/Mo/Ti/Pt/Au laminated in this order, each thickness is represented

by Ti (6 nm)/Mo (50 nm)/Ti (50 nm)/Pt (100 nm)/Au (210 nm). When the electrode comprises W/Pt/Au or W/Al/W/Au, the above-mentioned characteristics may be exhibited. Examples of other n-electrode comprises, from the second main surface side of the nitride semiconductor substrate, Hf/Al, Ti/W/Pt/Au, Ti/Pd/Pt/Au, Pd/Pt/Au, Ti/W/Ti/Pt/Au, Mo/Pt/Au, Mo/Ti/Pt/Au, W/Pt/Au, V/Pt/Au, V/Mo/Pt/Au, V/W/Pt/Au, Cr/Pt/Au, Cr/Mo/Pt/Au and Cr/W/Pt/Au. The n-electrode may be annealed at a temperature of 300°C or more after forming the electrode.

[0080]

The n-electrode 210 is formed into a rectangular shape. The n-electrode is formed by patterning in the region except a region that serves as scribe lines on the second main surface side in a scribe step for forming bars from the nitride semiconductor substrate as a post step. When a metallized electrode (which may be omitted) is formed on the n-electrode with the same pattern as the n-electrode, the electrode is readily scribed and cleavability is improved. Examples of the metallized electrode available include Ti-Pt-Au-(Au/Sn), Ti-Pt-Au-(Au/Si), Ti-Pt-Au-(Au/Ge), Ti-Pt-Au-In, Au/Sn, In, Au/Si and Au/Ge.

[0081]

A terrace may be formed on the second main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate. Forming the

terrace permits an inclined face other than the (000-1) plane to be exposed when the second main surface is the (000-1) plane. For example, crystal plane indices indicating planes other than the (000-1) plane are not specified to one plane, but include (10-15), (10-14) and (11-24) planes. The inclined surface other than the (000-1) plane preferably occupies 0.5% or more, more preferably in the range from 1% or more to 20% or less, of the surface area showing n-polarity.

[0082]

The terrace has a height of 0.1 μm or more at the interface thereof, and has a tapered or inversely tapered shape. The planar configuration of the terrace comprises concave and/or convex portions with a shape selected from striped, lattice, islet, circular, polygonal, rectangular, comb and mesh shapes. For example, when the convex portion is circular, the diameter of the circular convex portion is 5 μm or more. A width of the concave groove portion of 3 μm or more is preferable for preventing the electrode from being peeled. An off-angle may be formed in the range from 0.2 to 90° for exposing an inclined surface other than the (000-1) plane. Since the second main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate is provided for forming the n-electrode, ohmic characteristics can be improved by providing the (000-1) plane and planes other than the (000-1) plane. The semiconductor laser

element obtained in this embodiment is highly reliable.

[0083]

(Sixth step)

After forming the n-electrode 210, the wafer is divided into bars in the direction perpendicular to the striped p-electrode for forming a resonance surface of the semiconductor layer. The resonance surface lies on an M-plane (1-100) and A-plane (11-20). The wafer is divided into the bars by blade breaking, roller breaking or press breaking.

[0084]

The wafer dividing step is preferably performed in two steps in the semiconductor laser element of the present embodiment. This method permits the resonance surface to be formed with good yield.

[0085]

Auxiliary cleavage grooves are formed in advance by scribing the nitride semiconductor substrate from the first main surface side or from the second main surface side. The auxiliary cleavage groove is formed on the entire surface of the wafer, or at both ends of the wafer for forming the bars. Preferably, the auxiliary cleavage grooves are formed as broken lines in the cleavage direction for forming the bars with a space apart to one another. This permits the bar to be prevented from being bent in the cleavage direction.

[0086]

Subsequently, the wafer is divided into the bars with a breaker. The cleavage method includes blade breaking, roller breaking or press breaking. The n-electrode is partly or entirely formed on the second main surface of the semiconductor substrate.

[0087]

The wafer can be readily cleaved into the bars by forming the auxiliary cleavage groove on the first main surface and/or second main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate in advance. Forming the auxiliary cleavage groove on the second main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate is effective for preventing the electrode formed on the second main surface (back face) from being peeled. A reflection mirror may be formed on the resonance surface formed by cleaving. The reflection mirror is a dielectric multilayer film comprising SiO_2 , ZrO_2 , TiO_2 , Al_2O_3 or Nb_2O_5 . While the reflection mirror is formed on the light reflection side and/or light outgoing side of the resonance surface, it is preferably formed on the light reflection side and light outgoing side of the resonance surface. The resonance surface formed by cleaving permits the reflection mirror to be formed with good reproducibility.

[0088]

The nitride semiconductor laser element is formed into chips by dividing the bar of the nitride

semiconductor substrate in the direction parallel to the stripe direction of the electrode. The chip of the semiconductor laser element is rectangular, and the width of the rectangular resonance surface is 500 μm or less, preferably 400 μm or less. A semiconductor laser element having an opposed electrode structure in which contact resistivity is reduced to $1\text{E}-3 \Omega\text{cm}^2$ is thus obtained.

[0089]

<Second Embodiment>

The second embodiment is different from the first embodiment in that it has the p-electrode and the n-electrode are formed on the first main surface side of the substrate (the LD has an on-the-same-surface electrode structure in which a pair of the electrodes of the LD are formed on one side surface of the chip). The other portions are the same.

[0090]

<Third embodiment>

FIG. 3 is a schematic illustration of an example of the cross-sectional structure of the LD according to the third embodiment. The drawing shows an opposed electrode structure in which a pair of the electrodes of the LD are formed by being separated on and under the surfaces of the chip, respectively.

[0091]

The LD shown in FIG. 3 is different from the LD in

the first embodiment in that a part of the p-type semiconductor layer is changed into the first conductivity type (n-type) to have a thyristor structure in the peripheral region remote from the waveguide region. The other portions are the same, and denoted by the same reference signs.

[0093]

An example of the method for changing a part of the p-type semiconductor layer into the n-type to form a diffusion region (the portion shown by oblique lines in the drawing) is by allowing the n-type impurity to diffuse from the surface side of the p-type clad layer 208. The diffusion method comprises forming an Si-containing layer at a portion to be diffused, and heat-treating the layer. The heat treatment temperature and time are appropriately adjusted. The impurity concentration in the diffusion layer and the depth of diffusion from the surface are controlled by adjusting the heat treatment temperature and time. It is preferable to notice the relation between the n-type impurity concentration in the diffusion region and the effect of reducing the capacitance of the element in order to obtain an appropriate impurity concentration.

[0093]

<Fourth embodiment>

FIG. 4 is a schematic illustration of an example of the cross-sectional structure of the LD according to

a fourth embodiment.

[0094]

The LD in FIG. 4 is different from the LD in the first embodiment in that the LD has a face-down structure in which a metallized layer (a bump, not shown) is formed on the p-pad electrode for allowing the electrode to contact an external electrode in order to permit the p-electrode side of the semiconductor layer to serve as a mounting surface to a heat sink. The other portions are the same.

[0095]

The p-pad electrode 205 may be also used with the metallized layer. The metallized layer comprises a material such as Ag, Au, Sn, In, Bi, Cu or Zn. The nitride semiconductor element having the face-down structure may be provided with good reproducibility by using the nitride semiconductor substrate.

[0096]

Reliability of the LD according to the fourth embodiment is excellent with good heat dissipating ability.

<Other Embodiments>

Semiconductor laser elements according to the other embodiments include the one wherein the p-electrode is formed on only the p-side contact layer of the LD according to the embodiments described earlier. According to this structure, the electrode is

never peeled at the interface between the embedded layer and p-electrode since the embedded layer is not closely adhered to the p-electrode.

[0098]

The invention is applicable to a semiconductor laser element having an electric current narrowing layer that is a different structure from the semiconductor laser element comprising the waveguide of the striped ridge shape. The electric current narrowing layer refers to a layer having a function for permitting the electric current to selectively flow. A specific example of its composition is AlN. The electric current narrowing layer may be formed between the active layer and p-side contact layer, and is preferably formed on the p-side guide layer. The space between the electric current narrowing layers is from 0.5 to 3 μm . The thickness of the electric current narrowing layer is from 10 nm to 1 μm . This structure permits a semiconductor laser element having a region with a withstand voltage of 10 V or more other than the waveguide region in the semiconductor layer to be formed without implanting ions.

[0099]

The invention can also provide a semiconductor laser element having a plurality of waveguide regions on the nitride semiconductor substrate, and a semiconductor laser element having a wide ridge portion.

[0100]

All methods that are known for growing the nitride semiconductors such as MOVPE (metalorganic vapor phase epitaxy), HVPE (halide vapor phase epitaxy) and MBE (molecular beam epitaxy) may be applied for the practice of the invention.

[Examples]

[0101]

While several examples of LDs according to the invention are shown below, the invention is not restricted to these examples.

[0102]

[Example 1]

FIG. 1 shows a schematic illustration of the cross-sectional structure of the LD of Example 1. In Example 1, the semiconductor layer of the first conductivity type in the above mentioned first embodiment serves as an n-side semiconductor layer, while the semiconductor layer of the second conductivity type serves as a p-side semiconductor layer.

[0103]

The structure of this LD comprises an n-side clad layer 203, an n-side optical guide layer 204, an active layer 205, a p-side electron confinement layer 206, a p-side optical guide layer 207, a p-side clad layer 208 and a p-side contact layer 209 formed by lamination

growth on the first main surface of a GaN substrate 101 as nitride semiconductor layers. A waveguide region having a striped electric current narrowing region is formed in the p-side contact layer 209 and the p-side clad layer 208, and a resonance surface (not shown) is formed on an end surface approximately perpendicular to the waveguide region.

[0104]

The LD also comprises an embedded insulation film (for example, a ZrO_2 film with a thickness of 50 nm) 220 covering the side face of the waveguide region and the surface of the p-type semiconductor layer, a p-electrode 230 making ohmic contact with the surface (upper surface) of the waveguide region and covering the surface of the waveguide region and a part of the surface of the embedded insulation film, a protective insulation film 240 (for example, a SiO_2 film with a thickness of 500 nm), a p-pad electrode 250 on the p-electrode, and an n-electrode 210 on the second main surface of the GaN substrate. The protective insulation film 240 is formed so as to cover from the side face of the p-electrode 230 to the surface of the embedded insulation film 220, and side faces of the p-type semiconductor layers 208, 207 and 206, active layer 205, and n-type semiconductor layers 204, 203 and 202.

[0105]

The n-side clad layer 203 is $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.5$) doped with an n-type impurity, and n-side optical guide layer 204 is $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.3$). The active layer 205 is $\text{In}_x\text{Al}_y\text{Ga}_{1-x-y}\text{N}$ ($0 < x \leq 1$, $0 \leq y < 1$, $0 < x + y \leq 1$), and light emission in UV regions is possible by increasing the content of Al. The LD is also able to emit a light at a long wavelength side in the range from 360 to 580 nm. Luminous efficiency is improved by forming the active layer 205 as a quantum well structure. The composition of the well layer comprises In with a proportion of $0 < x \leq 0.5$. The thickness of the well layer is from 3 to 20 nm, while the thickness of the barrier layer is from 5 to 30 nm.

[0106]

The p-side electron confinement layer 206 is $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.5$) doped with a p-type impurity, the p-side optical guide layer 207 is $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.3$), the p-side clad layer 208 is $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 0.5$) doped with a p-type impurity, and the p-side contact layer 209 is $\text{Al}_x\text{Ga}_{1-x}\text{N}$ ($0 \leq x \leq 1$) doped with a p-type impurity. These semiconductor layers may be mixed with In. The electron confinement layer 206 may be omitted.

[0107]

The nitride semiconductor laser element of Example 1 has an SCH structure (Separate Confinement Heterostructure) in which the optical guide layers 204 and 207 are formed at both sides of the active layer

205, as described above. The n-clad layer 203 and p-clad layer 208 are formed on both sides of the optical guide layers, respectively. The clad layer comprises a nitride semiconductor layer having a low refractive index for endowing the layer with a light confinement function. The clad layer also has a carrier confinement function. A stress buffer layer may be provided between the layers.

[0108]

An insulative region 1 for reducing the capacitance of the element is formed in the peripheral region a give distance or more remote from the waveguide region, provided by converting at least a surface portion of the p-type semiconductor layers 208, 207 and 206, and the active layer 205 into a higher resistance one by ion implantation. As shown in FIG. 2(b), when the width of the ridge portion is about 1.6 μm , and the total width of the region for securing safety zones (a zone provided by taking migration of introduced atoms by thermal diffusion into consideration) on the ridge portion and both sides thereof is about 5 μm , the distance (separating distance) between the ridge portion and the insulative region 1 for reducing the capacitance of the element is about 1.7 μm .

[0109]

Al is used as an ion species, and the ions are

bombarded three times. Each bombardment dosage is the same level of 1×10^{16} atoms/cm², wherein the acceleration voltage and peak implantation depth are 30 KeV and 50 nm, respectively, in the first bombardment, 45 KeV and 75 nm, respectively, in the second bombardment, and 60 KeV and 100 nm, respectively, in the third bombardment. However, the insulation region for reducing the capacitance of the element can be formed by a small amount of implantation of the ion. Measured data of the bluish-purple LDs of the example and comparative example produced by the above-mentioned process are shown below.

[0110]

Sample	Example (ion implantation)	Comparative Example (no ion implantation)
(1) output 5 mW	0.40 nsec	1.03 nsec
(2) output 30 mW	0.34 nsec	0.87 nsec

The data above show that each of the rise time t_r and fall time t_f representing high-speed responsiveness depending on RC of the LD is 0.40 nsec in the sample at an output of 5 mW, which is 40% shorter than that in the comparative example. Each of t_r and t_f is 0.34 nsec in the sample at an output of 30 mW, which is also 40% shorter than that in the comparative example. In other words, a high-speed responsiveness (t_r and t_f) of 1 ns or shorter could be obtained in both samples.

[0111]

FIG. 5 shows an example of distribution of the impurity concentration in the depth direction of the peripheral region of the waveguide region of the bluish-purple LD shown in FIG. 1 when, for example, Al ions are implanted in the region.

[0112]

As shown in FIG. 5, it is preferable to obtain appropriate distribution of the impurity concentration in the depth direction of the nitride semiconductor layer at the peripheral region of the waveguide region of the bluish-purple LD.

[0113]

[Method of producing LD of Example 1].

A sapphire or GaAs substrate is placed in an MOCVD reaction apparatus, and the temperature is set at 500°C. Then, a buffer layer of GaN is allowed to grow to a thickness of 20 nm using trimethyl gallium (TMG) and ammonia (NH₃). After allowing the buffer layer to grow, the temperature is adjusted to 1050°C, and an underlayer formed of GaN is allowed to grow to a thickness of 4 μm.

[0114]

The wafer is taken out of the reaction vessel after growing the underlayer, a striped photomask is formed on the surface of the underlayer, and a protective film formed of a SiO₂ with a stripe width in

the range from 10 to 300 μm and an inter-stripe distance (window) in the range from 5 to 300 μm is formed with a CVD apparatus.

[0115]

After the protective film is formed, the wafer is transferred to a HVPE (halide vapor phase epitaxy) apparatus, and a nitride semiconductor formed of GaN is allowed to grow to a thickness of 400 μm using Ga metal, HCl gas and ammonia gas as starting materials while oxygen is doped as an n-type impurity. Crystal defects are reduced in the order of two digits or more by allowing the GaN film with a thickness of 100 μm or more to grow while the nitride semiconductor is allowed to grow on the protective film by the HVPE method. The GaN substrate from which the dissimilar substrate, etc., have been peeled by grinding, cutting, CMP or laser irradiation is used as the nitride semiconductor substrate. The thickness of the GaN substrate is about 400 μm . The GaN substrate 101 has a dislocation density of $1 \times 10^6/\text{cm}^2$ or less at least under a waveguide forming region.

[0116]

A low temperature growth buffer layer 201, an intermediate layer 202 and a crack preventive layer may be laminated and grown between the semiconductor substrate 101 and n-side clad layer 203 when the semiconductor layers are allowed to grow on the

semiconductor substrate 101.

[0117]

(n-side clad layer 203)

Subsequently, a layer formed of $\text{Al}_{0.03}\text{Ga}_{0.97}\text{N}$ doped with $1 \times 10^{19}/\text{cm}^3$ of Si is allowed to grow to a thickness of 2 μm at 1050°C using TMA (trimethyl aluminum), TMG, ammonia and silane gases. The n-side clad layer may have a super-lattice structure.

[0118]

(n-side optical guide layer 204)

Then, feed of the silane gas is suspended, and the n-side optical guide layer formed of undoped GaN is allowed to grow at 1050°C to a thickness of 0.175 μm . This n-side optical guide layer may be doped with an n-type impurity.

[0119]

(Active layer 205)

Then, a barrier layer formed of Si doped $\text{In}_{0.02}\text{Ga}_{0.98}\text{N}$ is allowed to grow to a thickness of 14 nm at a temperature of 800°C. Subsequently, a well layer formed of undoped $\text{In}_{0.07}\text{Ga}_{0.93}\text{N}$ is allowed to grow to a thickness of 7 nm at the same temperature. The barrier layer and well layer is alternately laminated twice, and the layers are finally terminated by the barrier layer to allow an active layer of a multi-quantum well structure (MQW) to grow to a total thickness of 56 nm.

[0120]

(p-side cap layer 206)

Subsequently, the temperature is raised to 1050°C, and a p-side cap layer formed of p-type $\text{Al}_{0.25}\text{Ga}_{0.75}\text{N}$ doped with 1×10^{20} atoms/cm³ of Mg, which has larger band gap energy than the p-side optical guide layer, is allowed to grow to a thickness of 10 nm using TMG, TMA, ammonia, and Cp_2Mg (cyclopentadienyl magnesium). The p-side cap layer may be omitted.

[0121]

(p-side optical guide layer 207)

Feed of Cp_2Mg and TMA is suspended, and a p-side optical guide layer formed of undoped GaN, which has smaller band gap energy than the p-side cap layer 10, is allowed to grow at 1050°C to a thickness of 0.14 μm .

[0122]

(p-side clad layer 208)

Then, a layer formed of undoped $\text{Al}_{0.1}\text{Ga}_{0.9}\text{N}$ is allowed to grow to a thickness of 2.5 nm at 1050°C, feed of Cp_2Mg and TMA is suspended to allow a layer formed of undoped GaN to grow to a thickness of 2.5 nm, and a p-side clad layer of a super-lattice structure to a total thickness of 0.4 μm is allowed to grow (p-side contact layer 209).

Finally, a p-side contact layer formed of p-type GaN doped with 1×10^{20} atoms/cm³ of Mg is allowed to grow to a thickness of 15 nm at 1050°C on the p-side clad layer.

[0123]

The wafer on which the nitride semiconductor is grown as described above is taken out of the reaction vessel, a protective film formed of SiO_2 is formed on the surface of the p-side contact layer as the uppermost layer, and the protective layer is etched with SiCl_4 gas by RIE (reactive ion etching). The n-side clad layer is exposed by the above-mentioned process.

[0124]

Then, a protective film (not shown) consisting of a striped SiO_2 film is formed on the surface of the p-side contact layer, and a ridge portion that serves as a striped waveguide region is formed by etching with SiCl_4 gas by RIE (reactive ion etching).

[0125]

Subsequently, ions are implanted for forming an insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element. An ion implantation mask is formed at first except the region corresponding to the insulative region for reducing the capacitance of the element using a photolithography technique, and ions are implanted under a predetermined condition from the surface of the p-type semiconductor layer (from the surface of the wafer). In this Example, ion implantation is applied by bombarding ionized Al three times. The dosage is the same level of $1\text{E}+16$

(ions/cm²) for each implantation, and the acceleration voltage and peak implantation depth are 30 KeV and 50 nm, respectively, for the first implantation, 45 KeV and 75 nm, respectively, for the second implantation, and 60 KeV and 100 nm, respectively, for the third implantation.

[0126]

Then, the side face of the ridge portion and the surface of the p-side clad layer 208 are covered with an embedded insulation film 220 formed of ZrO₂ for protecting the surfaces. Subsequently, a p-electrode 230 formed of Ni (10 nm)/Au (150 nm) is formed on the surfaces of the p-side contact layer 209 and the embedded insulation film 220. Ohmic annealing is applied thereafter at 600°C, and a protective film 240 formed of SiO₂ is formed on a part of the p-electrode (side end part), on the insulation film 220 and on the side face of the semiconductor layers by sputtering so that the thickness of the film is 0.5 μm. Then, Ni(100 nm)/Ti(100 nm)/Au(800 nm) films are continuously formed on the exposed part of the p-electrode 230 to form a p-pad electrode 250. Then, an n-electrode 210 formed of V(10nm)/Pt(200 nm)/Au(300 nm) is formed on the second main surface of the nitride semiconductor substrate 101.

[0127]

Subsequently, convex grooves are formed on the first main surface side of a wafer of the nitride

semiconductor substrate on which the n-electrode, p-electrode and p-pad electrode are formed. The depth of the concave groove is 10 μm . The width of the groove is 50 μm and 15 μm in the directions parallel to and perpendicular to the resonance surface, respectively.

Then, the LD element is cleaved into bars from the surface side of the nitride semiconductor substrate on which the n-electrode is formed using the concave groove as an auxiliary cleavage line to define the cleaved surface ((1-100) plane, the plane corresponding to the side face of a hexagonal column crystal = M-plane) as a resonance surface.

[0128]

Then, a dielectric multi-layer film formed of SiO_2 and TiO_2 is formed on the resonance surface, and finally the bars are formed into chips in the direction parallel to the p-electrode to allow the chip to serve as a semiconductor laser element. The length of the resonator is from 300 to 1000 μm . Concave grooves are formed at the right and left corners at the resonance surface side of the nitride semiconductor laser element. The depth of the concave groove is 10 μm , and the width is 30 μm and 10 μm in directions parallel and perpendicular to the resonance surface, respectively.

[0129]

This laser element is mounted on a heat sink, and laser emission is attempted at room temperature by

wire-bonding the p-electrode. Then, laser light is continuously emitted at room temperature at an oscillation wavelength in the range from 400 to 420 nm and a threshold current density of 2.9 kA/cm^2 . A laser element with good life span characteristics can be produced with good reproducibility without any cleaving damages even when the resonance surface is formed by cleaving, wherein the life span is 10,000 hours under conditions of the light output power CW of 80 mW and an operating temperature of 70°C .

[0130]

[Example 2]

In the procedures of Example 1, when the nitride semiconductor substrate 101 is formed, silane gas is added to the starting material in the HVPE apparatus, and a nitride semiconductor substrate formed of GaN doped with silicon (Si) or oxygen (O) at a concentration of $1 \times 10^{18} \text{ atoms/cm}^3$ is grown to a thickness of $500 \text{ }\mu\text{m}$. The Si concentration is desirably in the range from $1 \times 10^{17} \text{ atoms/cm}^3$ to $5 \times 10^{19} \text{ atoms/cm}^3$. After the nitride semiconductor substrate is grown, the sapphire substrate and buffer layer are removed by laser irradiation or grinding as in Example 1 to obtain the nitride semiconductor substrate 101. A laser element having characteristics comparable to those in Example 1 is efficiently obtained under the same conditions as in Example 1, except for the above.

[0131]

[Example 3]

In the procedures in Example 1, an n-side clad layer is grown on the nitride semiconductor substrate 101 through an intermediate layer 202. Except for this, a semiconductor laser element is formed under the same conditions as in Example 1.

[0132]

The intermediate layer 202 is formed of GaN doped with Si at 1050°C at a concentration of 3×10^{18} atoms/cm³, and is grown on the nitride semiconductor substrate 101 to a thickness of 4 μm, using ammonia and TMG, and silane gas as an impurity gas.

[0133]

[Example 4]

In the procedures of Example 1, an n-side clad layer is grown on the nitride semiconductor substrate 101 through the intermediate layer 202 and a crack preventive layer. Except for this, a semiconductor laser element is formed under the same conditions as in Example 1.

[0134]

The crack preventive layer is formed of In_{0.06}Ga_{0.94}N grown to a thickness of 0.15 μm at a temperature of 800°C using TMG, TMI (trimethyl indium) and ammonia.

[Example 5]

In the procedures of Example 1, the n-side clad

layer is formed into a super-lattice structure. Except for this, a semiconductor laser element is formed under the same conditions in Example 1. The n-side clad layer in this example is formed by growing a layer of undoped $\text{Al}_{0.1}\text{Ga}_{0.9}\text{N}$ to a thickness of 2.5 nm at 1050°C using TMA (trimethyl aluminum), TMG and ammonia, then stopping the supply of TMA, and supplying silane gas to grow a layer of n-type GaN doped with Si at a concentration of 1×10^{19} atoms/cm³ to a thickness of 2.5 nm. The super-lattice layer is constructed by alternately laminating these layers to the total thickness of 2 μm .

[0135]

[Example 6]

FIG. 3 illustrates a cross-sectional structure of the LD in Example 6. There is shown an opposed electrode structure in which a pair of electrodes of the LD are separated on and under the chip.

[0136]

This structure of the LD is different from the LD in Example 1 in that the region 4 for reducing the capacitance of the element is formed by forming an npn structure in which a part of the p-type semiconductor layer is changed into an n-type in the direction of thickness in the region remote from the waveguide region, and other parts are the same between them. For changing a part of the p-type semiconductor layer into

the n-type in the direction of thickness, an n-type impurity layer (for example, an Si layer) is formed at the side of the surface of the p-type clad layer, and the element is heat-treated in an annealing furnace for a given time. The heat treatment temperature is appropriately controlled, for example in the range from 400°C to 700°C. The heat treatment time is also appropriately controlled, for example in the range from 10 minutes to 2 hours. A region having a desired impurity concentration, concentration distribution and diffusion depth may be obtained by controlling the heat treatment temperature and time.

[Brief Description of Drawings]

[0137]

FIG. 1 is a view schematically illustrating an example of the cross-section of an LD according to the first embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 schematically illustrate the cross-section of a semiconductor layer portion at the ridge and in the vicinity thereof of the LD in FIG. 1, and a relation between a plane pattern of said semiconductor layer portion and an ion-implanted region.

FIG. 3 is a schematic illustration of an example of the cross-section of the LD according to a third embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 4 is a schematic illustration of an example of the cross-section of the LD according to a fourth

embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 5 is an illustrative characteristic graph showing an example of the distribution of the impurity concentration in the depth direction of an insulation region formed by ion implantation into the semiconductor portion of the LD in FIG. 1.

FIG. 6 schematically illustrate characteristic graphs showing an example of the relation between the acceleration voltage or the implantation depth and the effect of reducing the capacitance of the element when ions are implanted for forming an insulation region in the semiconductor layer portion of the LD in FIG. 1.

FIG. 7 is a schematic illustration of an example of the cross-sectional structure of the LD when ions are implanted plural times by changing ion species for forming an insulation region in the semiconductor layer portion of the LD in FIG. 1.

[Explanation of Reference Signs]

[0138]

1...insulative region 1 for reducing the capacitance of the element, 2...ridge portion, 101...substrate, 201...low temperature growth buffer layer, 202...intermediate layer, 203...n-side clad layer, 204...n-side light guide layer, 205...active layer, 206...p-side electron confinement layer, 207...p-side light guide layer, 208...p-side clad layer, 209...p-side contact layer, 210...second electrode, 220...embedded insulation film, 230...first electrode,

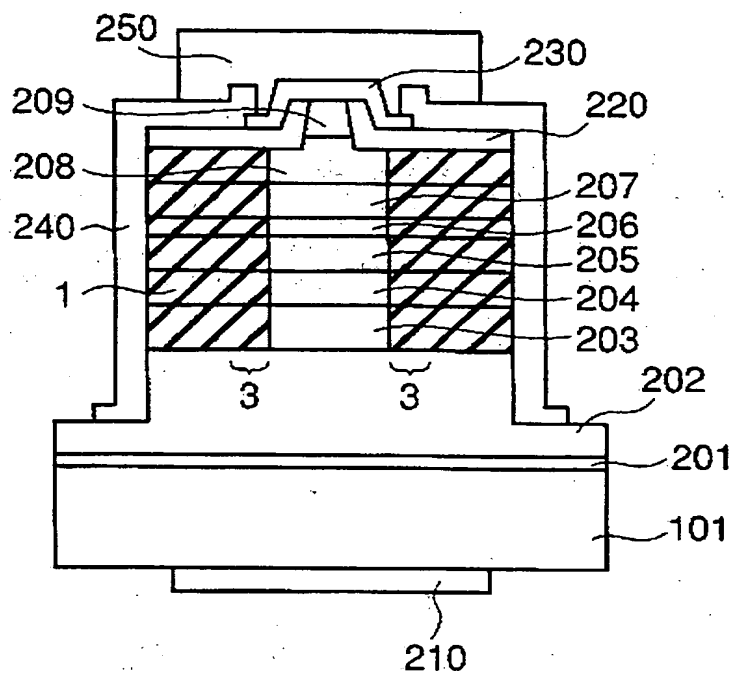
240...protective insulation film, 250...pad electrode

[Name of Document] ABSTRACT

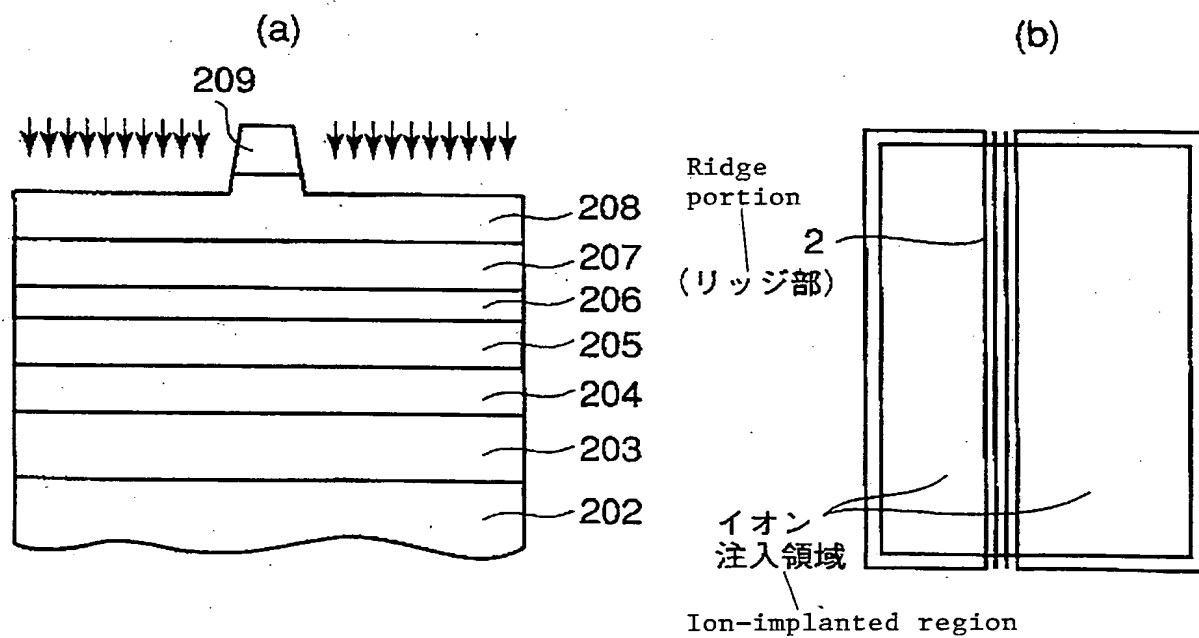
[Abstract]

[Problem] To comply with requirement of high-speed responsiveness by largely reducing the capacitance of the nitride semiconductor laser element.

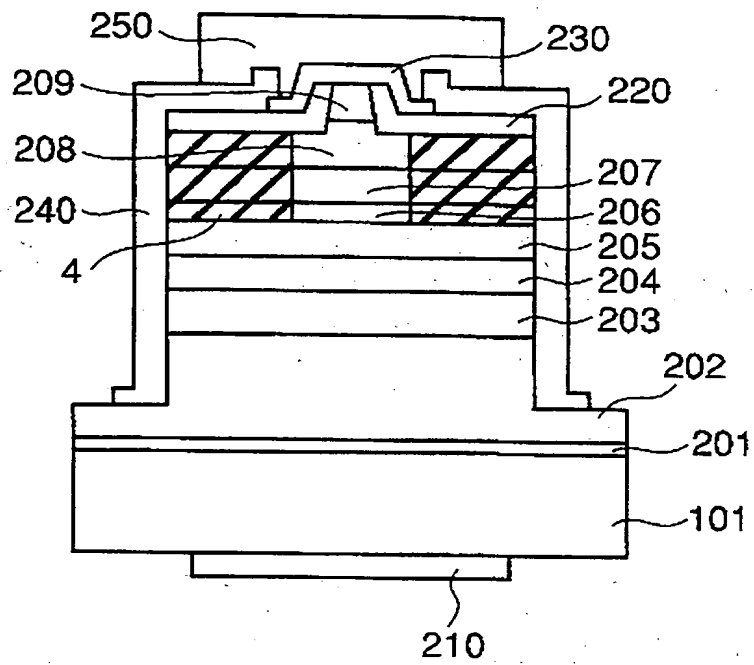
[Solution to Problem] In a nitride semiconductor laser element including an n-type semiconductor layer, an active layer 205 and a p-type semiconductor layer each laminated on the main surface of a substrate 101 and formed of a nitride, wherein a striped ridge portion 2 is formed in the p-type semiconductor layer, pn-junctions of the semiconductor layer in the peripheral region remote from the ridge portion are broken by ion implantation to form an insulative region 1 for reducing the capacitance of the element.



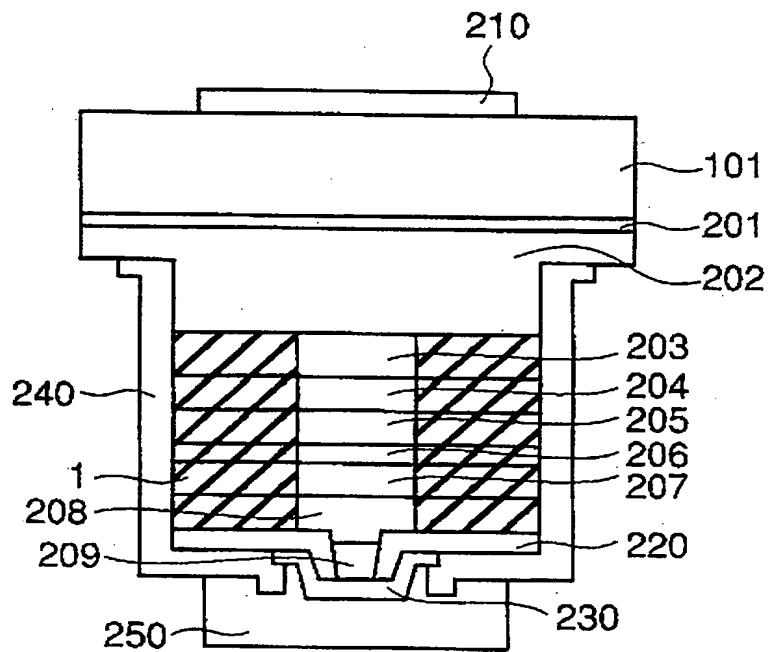
【図 2】 FIG. 2



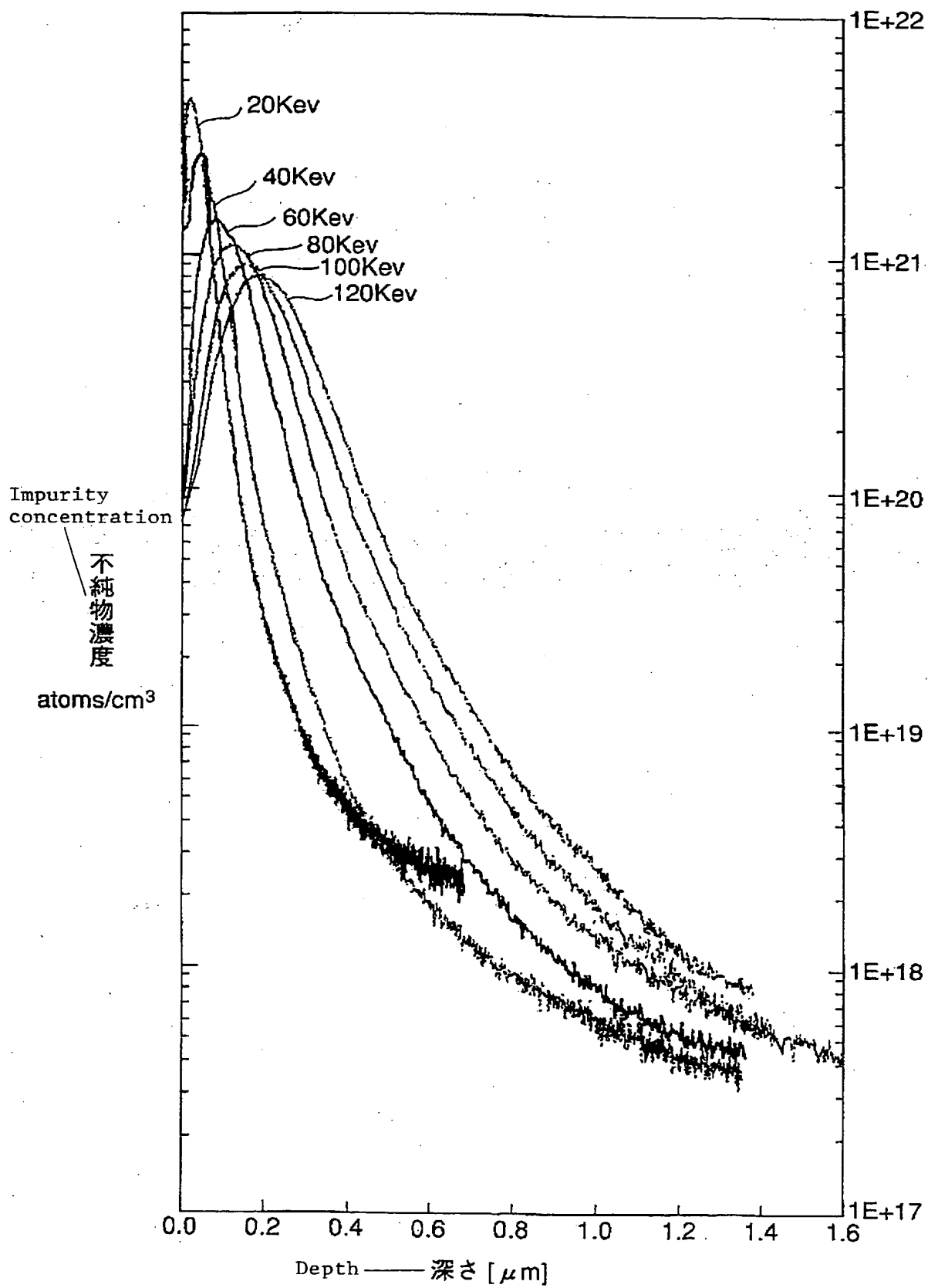
【図3】 FIG. 3



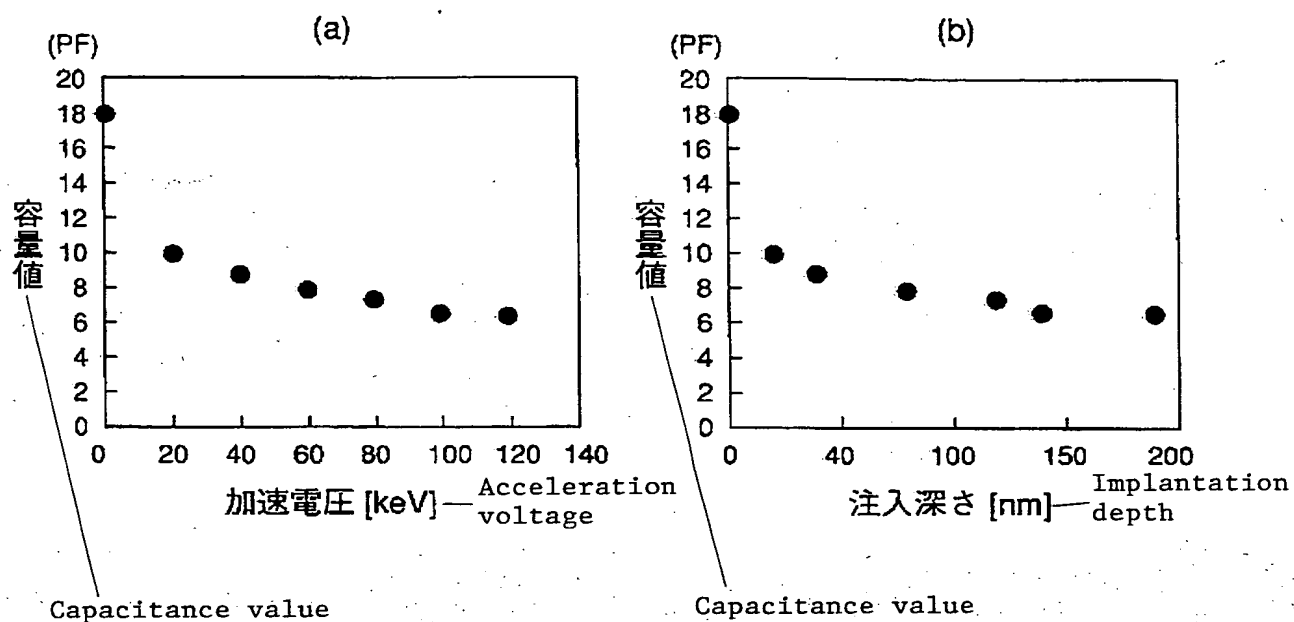
【図4】 FIG. 4



【図5】 FIG. 5



【図6】 FIG. 6



【図7】 FIG. 7

